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FM AMEMBASSY MINSK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3717
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0290
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0850
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS MINSK 000117

SIPDIS

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PASS USTR FOR ALLGEIER, CKLEIN, AND DWOSKIN
EB/OT FOR CRAFT
USDOC FOR ITA/JACOBS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ETRD](#) [WTRO](#) [PGOV](#) [USTR](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: MFA Wants Positive WTO Answer Now

Ref: 05 Minsk 1422

¶1. (U) On February 2, Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Mikhnevich called Ambassador to the MFA to complain again about the U.S., EU and the WTO. Also present were Anton Kudasov, Deputy Director of the MFA's Directorate of Foreign Trade, Sergey Gulevich, Deputy Head of the MFA's Division of Foreign Trade Policy, and Maksim Ryzhenkov, Director of the MFA's Americas Department.

¶2. (U) Mikhnevich presented documents purporting to provide requested information regarding Belarus' use of the Golden Share and customs confiscations (see para 5). He said the GOB presented these documents to the U.S. and EU delegations in Geneva on January ¶24. The GOB would like to discuss the Golden Share with interested parties in Geneva at an informal Working Party on February 20, and confiscations the 21st. Mikhnevich stressed he wanted the world to understand why Belarus had to be so strict in these areas, but was now able to ease up regarding confiscations. These would be a prelude to a multilateral Working Party meeting on February 25, which would decide on Belarus' advancing to the next stage of WTO talks. He also presented a letter stating, "I also have the pleasure to inform you that Belarusian delegation [sic] will be conducting the next round of negotiations on the accession of Belarus to the World Trade Organization in Geneva from 20 to 24 February 2006..." The note requests the USG assist in scheduling a bilateral meeting with the U.S. delegation the week of February 20.

¶3. (SBU) Mikhnevich claimed the Belarusian delegation was told January 27 that the U.S. delegation agreed to these meetings. However, he stated the U.S. delegation changed its mind and informed the Belarusians on January 30 that they needed more time to review the GOB's documents. Mikhnevich and Kudasov vented at length that they cannot understand how it takes the U.S. more than three weeks "to review five pages." [Comment: however, it took the GOB several months to write these "five pages."] Mikhnevich and Kudasov also speculated that the U.S. delegation wanted to help Belarus join the WTO, but had received orders from the EU to block any meeting in February. Both complained that the EU is doing everything it can to put the brakes on Belarusian accession, and Mikhnevich asked Ambassador, "Who is in charge, the U.S. or EU?" Mikhnevich repeatedly claimed Belarus has done everything asked of it toward accession, but has not been allowed to make any progress.

¶4. (SBU) Ambassador half-jokingly replied that Assistant Secretary for EUR Daniel Fried and the EU's Director General for External

Affairs Robert Cooper would have gladly discussed WTO if they had been allowed to come to Minsk this week. Mikhnevich, seemingly in all seriousness, responded that the pair would be welcome in Minsk, if they would confine their remarks to the WTO. Ambassador also mentioned the theoretical possibility of informal talks between USTR and Belarusian experts via digital video conference. Mikhnevich said such talks would be helpful.

15. (SBU) Comment: The GOB continues to push strongly for WTO membership, but is unwilling to make any of the changes needed for accession. They seem to believe that membership is only a matter of a simple political decision. Most likely, Lukashenko ordered his government to secure membership (one informed source told Econoff Lukashenko does not want Belarus to be the last FSU state to join--it is simply a matter of pride) and the MFA is marching ahead. Post found the answers the GOB provided on the Golden Share and confiscations to be misleading and incomplete (Post analysis was emailed to EUR/UMB). By providing insufficient answers and demanding results in an unrealistic time frame, the MFA will be able to report to Lukashenko that they tried, but were blocked by the nefarious West.

KROL